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Organizational matters

Follow-up to the report on the rationalization of documentation and the streamlining of the working methods of the Executive Board

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I. Background

1. At the annual session of the Executive Board in June 2001, members of the Board requested that the secretariat review the existing practices of the Board with a view to streamlining its documentation and working methods.

2. Building on previous legislation, in particular decisions 96/6 and 96/45, UNDP and UNFPA presented a joint proposal (DP/2001/CRP.17-DP/FPA/2001/CRP.2) to the Board at its second regular session in September 2001 outlining an approach for reducing the volume and increasing the readability of documentation; ensuring earlier submission; and facilitating easier, more interactive dialogue.

3. In 2002, Bureau meetings were the initial locus for further discussion on improving the working methods of the Board. The Swedish Mission presented a report to the Bureau in April seeking ways in which the Board could be more strategic and dynamic, build stronger links with the field, foster more effective interaction with other Boards, and produce fewer and better documentation. The only formal response to the proposals by Sweden came from the Latin America and the Caribbean group.

4. As planned in Bureau meetings, informal consultations took place both at the annual session of the Board in June in Geneva and at its second regular session in New York in September. At its second regular session 2002, the Board adopted decision 2002/23 on field visits and 2002/27 on a joint Executive Board meeting to be held in January 2003, demonstrating its resolve to move forward on efforts to improve its working methods. The results of the informal debate are summarized below.

5. Further to these efforts, the Bureau has proposed to promote discussions on the working methods of the Board from the informal to formal level and take a decision thereon. A separate item on the work plan of the first regular session 2003 will therefore address efforts to improve the working methods of the Board.

II. Documentation

6. Although there has been a net improvement in the size, content and quality of documents, a more focused, action-oriented and clearer presentation is still needed, with less jargon, providing a range of options and scenarios to facilitate policy formulation. Documents should include decisions, resolutions and lists of acronyms for easy reference. The Executive Board should also restrict the number of documents that it receives for discussion.

III. Working methods of the Executive Board

7. It is necessary to reach an agreement first on the shortcomings that have constrained the functioning of the Executive Board and subsequently recommend corrective measures, taking into account General Assembly resolution 48/162 on the functioning of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board and its rules of procedure.

Modifying the functioning of the Board may impact the work of other United Nations bodies.

A. Organization

8. *Preparation of the Executive Board work plan for 2003*. To ensure true ownership of the Executive Board work plan for 2003, its preparation should involve a wider participation of Board members.

9. *Seating arrangements*. The size of the conference room should be commensurate with the number of participants. Seating should be arranged accordingly and in sufficient number for each delegation in order to facilitate dialogue and note-taking. The podium should also be arranged to avoid a teacher-pupil relationship, particularly during panel discussions. The practical problems and financial consequences of such an undertaking, however, need to be adequately addressed.

10. *List of participants*. The list of participants should be distributed at the start of the session to facilitate consultations.

11. *Statements*. To allow for greater interaction, statements should be short or use bullet points. The practice, albeit rarely used, of one delegation speaking on behalf of others on particular items, should be encouraged. Distributing written statements was seen as positive, demonstrating that sufficient preparation had been undertaken. Accordingly, they did not constitute a drawback to the work of the Board.

12. *Drafting of decisions*. Presentation of draft decisions should be done using on-screen projection; present arrangements are less efficient and effective.

B. Process

13. *Thematic informal meetings*. Thematic informal meetings on one or several practice areas of UNDP should take place during the sessions of the Board.

14. *Joint sessions of the Executive Boards*. Cross-cutting issues among relevant United Nations organizations should continue to be taken up during joint sessions of the Boards.

15. *Joint consideration of country programme outlines*. As part of continuing efforts to harmonize and coordinate the work of UNDP and UNFPA, the country programme outlines should be discussed together.

16. *Improving dialogue between programme and donor countries*. It is important to improve interaction between programme and donor countries during Executive Board, which could be done through thematic working sub-groups.

17. *Communication of Executive Board decisions to Member States*. Since decisions of the Board take a long time to reach relevant government officials, improvements should be made in current arrangements. The Board should also improve its contacts with programme countries in order to understand and appreciate better the situation on the ground.

18. *Field visits*. Despite enthusiasm for field visits, a more participatory approach is necessary in the selection of countries to be visited and in drawing up the terms of reference for such missions.

19. *Benefiting from officials of programme countries*. The Board needs to make better use of national or United Nations officials who participate in the sessions of the Board. Their experience and knowledge of programme countries would benefit and enrich discussions of the Board.

Joint meeting with the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

20. The Board should explore the possibilities of holding a joint informal meeting between the Executive Board and representatives of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to exchange views on current thinking within DAC on development policy.

21. One of the Board sessions or a seminar could be held in a programme country in order to bring together a wide range of participants from government and non-state sectors. To minimize expenses, field visits could be expanded in an integrated manner with a longer duration. The experience in Afghanistan, where a holistic approach was used, enabled a successful sharing of experiences and information among many stakeholders.

22. From a financial viewpoint, however, it might be more advantageous to hold all future annual sessions of the Board in New York – and thereby forego sessions in Geneva altogether – because it would reduce costs for both the Executive Board secretariat and Member countries.

C. Shifting from informal to formal discussions

23. The Board may wish to consider shifting from informal to formal discussions with regard to certain issues, namely field visits and joint meetings of the Boards. The preparation of the agenda for the first regular session in 2003 offers such an opportunity to the Bureau and the Board to promote these issues to the operational level. The field visit to Viet Nam demonstrated the need for a closer relationship between the Board and programme countries. The horizontal coordination and coherence at the country level was also crucial among the United Nations organizations and between them and other stakeholders such as the international financial institutions. These and other issues could be part of the Executive Board sessions so that the Board and programme countries understand each other better.

24. Regarding the joint meeting of the Executive Boards, the Bureau and the Board should propose cross-cutting issues of a more strategic nature and allocate sufficient time for more in-depth discussions at the January 2003 joint meeting of the Boards.

25. Enabling decisions could be adopted by the Board to move the process from informal to formal debate at the Board sessions.